

Department of Public Health
and Human Services

Section:
APPLICATION PROCESSING

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Subject:
Application Filing/Interview Process

Supersedes: FS 103-1 (10/01/06)

References: 7 CFR 273.2; 7 CFR 273.14

GENERAL RULE -- The application process to determine eligibility for the Food Stamp Program includes filing and completing an application form, being interviewed, and verifying necessary information. A household has the right to file an application in person, through an authorized representative, by fax or other electronic transmission, or by mail. The household may submit the application to any Office of Public Assistance (OPA).

FILING AN APPLICATION

When a household or authorized representative contacts the OPA and expresses interest in receiving food stamp assistance or expresses concerns which indicate food insecurity, the OPA shall encourage the household or authorized representative to file an application the same day it contacts the OPA. If the household contacts the OPA by telephone and does not want to come to the office that day to file an application or there is a written request for food assistance, the OPA must mail the household an application the same day it receives the request.

The OPA must not require a completed application prior to scheduling an interview. When the household requests assistance with completing the application, the OPA will assist the household with completing its application.

When a joint application is received for TANF cash assistance and food stamp benefits, the household must be informed the work requirements of TANF (e.g., Family Investment Agreement/WoRC Employability Plan activities) do not apply to Food Stamp Program eligibility. If the household is encouraged to conserve its time-limited TANF benefits, the OPA Case Manager must inform the household TANF time limits do not apply to food stamp eligibility and encourage the household to continue with its application for food stamp benefits.

APPLICATIONS BY OPA STAFF

Special handling is given to an employee's case and an employee's immediate family's case to avoid a conflict of interest and to ensure privacy.

Cases having a conflict of interest between a household and an OPA employee are assigned to OPA staff member accordingly by the OPA supervisor or designee.

SCREEN FOR EXPEDITED PROCESSING

All applications must be screened for expedited processing immediately upon receipt in the OPA when the applicant requests food stamp benefits (FS 105-1).

DATE OF APPLICATION

The date of application is the date the front page of the application is received and date-stamped in the OPA. If determined eligible, benefits are prorated from that date.

► An application (HCS-250) previously received regardless of whether the application was or was not processed for TANF or Medicaid can be used as an application if the household wants to apply for food stamp benefits and the application is less than 30 days old. The application must be date-stamped with the date the household re-signs the application to apply for food stamp benefits. If determined eligible, benefits are prorated from that date. The information on the application must be updated during the interview.

► **Example:** An application (HCS-250) was submitted for Medicaid on April 2nd. The household calls on April 15th and requests food stamp benefits.

Since the application (HCS-250) submitted for Medicaid on April 2nd is less than 30 days old, it can be used to determine food stamp eligibility. The application must be date-stamped with the date the household signs the application again. If determined eligible, benefits are prorated from that date. The information on the application is updated during the food stamp interview.

NOTE: When a resident of an institution jointly applies for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and food stamp benefits prior to leaving the institution, the filing date of the application is the date of discharge from the institution.

An action must be taken on all date-stamped applications. Once date-stamped, the *original* application cannot be returned to the household even if the household requests withdrawal of its application. The household has a right to receive copies of the contents of its case file (FS 101-1).

APPLICATIONS FILED BY THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Social Security Administration (SSA) staff accepts completed applications submitted by SSI households for the Food Stamp Program. SSA forwards all applications for food stamp benefits to the OPA. The OPA must review applications mailed from the SSA office to determine entitlement to expedited services. The review must be done the day the application is received in the OPA. Applications forwarded from the SSA office are

prorated from the date SSA office received the application. The date the application is received by OPA and screened is the date of discovery for expedited services.

The OPA Case Manager is not required to interview households who made application for food stamp benefits at the SSA office. The OPA Case Manager may contact the household if the application was not properly completed, mandatory verification is missing, or information is questionable. This contact does not constitute an interview.

COMPLETED APPLICATION

The OPA Case Manager must ensure all items on the application are completed in accordance with the application's instructions, and the application must be signed before the household can be determined eligible for food stamp benefits. OPA staff will assist the household with completing its application when the household requests assistance completing the application.

When the OPA Case Manager writes updated information on the application, a suggested best practice is to use a different colored ink pen than the color used by the applicant to complete the application. Any portion of the form completed by a person other than the household should be initialed by that person.

TIME FRAME FOR PROCESSING THE APPLICATION

The application must be processed in order to provide eligible households the opportunity to participate (receive benefits) as soon as possible, but not later than:

1. Thirty calendar days following the date of application for regular processing; or,
2. Seven calendar days following the date of application for households eligible for expedited services (FS 105-1).

Food stamp applications processed under regular processing timelines must be processed so the household will receive benefits by the 30th day following the date of application unless the application is properly pended for required verification needed to approve the application. The OPA Case Manager must take into consideration mail time, weekends, and holidays. An application is considered properly pended until the 30th day following the date of application if the verification requested is required information to approve the application such as income, questionable resources, household composition, etc.

Example 1: The application was received on November 18th. The 30 day processing timeline is December 18th which is a Sunday. If all required verification is received, the

application must be authorized by December 14th. The EBT card is mailed on the 15th and that allows for two days mail time so the household will receive the EBT card in the mail on Saturday, December 17th.

Example 2: The application was received on November 18th. The household was required to verify wages and shelter expenses. Verification of wages was received on November 25th. On December 14th the shelter expenses were not verified, so the application is processed without allowing the shelter expenses. The shelter expenses are verified on December 16th. Benefits are restored for November because verification was provided within 30 days following the date of application, supplemented for December, and increased for January.

Example 3: The application was received on November 18th. The household was required to verify wages and shelter expenses. Verification was not received as of December 19th (household has through the 19th because the 18th falls on a weekend). On December 20th the application is denied using the F200 TEAMS notice due to failure to verify wages (not shelter expenses).

If the household provides the verification after the 30 day period following the date of application but before the 60th day following the date of application, benefits are prorated from the date the verification was provided (FS 104-1).

Example 4: The application was received November 18th. The household is interviewed on December 12th. Verification of wages and shelter expenses were requested to be received via TEAMS notice within 10 days. Verification of wages was received on December 20th, but the shelter verification was not received. On December 23rd the application is processed without using the shelter expenses. On December 29th the shelter verification is received. January benefits are increased and a supplement is not authorized for December since the verification was not received within the 10 day request for information period.

If a household reapplies for food stamp benefits after a break in participation of any length of time, benefits are prorated from the date the household reapplies for food stamp benefits (FS 104-4).

EXCEPTION: Migrant and seasonal farm worker households receive a full month's benefits if they reapply after a break in participation of less than 30 days (FS 105-2).

OPA RESPONSIBLE FOR PROCESSING APPLICATION

A household may submit an application to any OPA. The OPA receiving the application date-stamps it, registers it upon receipt, schedules an interview, and processes the application.

At the request of the household to be interviewed and/or to have its case maintained at an OPA more convenient for it, the OPA will fax the first page and mail the original application on the same day as received to the OPA requested by the household. This OPA registers the application upon receipt, schedules an interview, and processes the application. A case open on food stamps along with TANF, and/or a Medicaid program must be managed by the same OPA. The programs' most restrictive policy applies regarding the OPA that will maintain the case. TANF has the most restrictive policy. Medicaid and the Food Stamp Program policies are less restrictive.

INTERVIEWS

All households applying for food stamp benefits must have an interview conducted by qualified OPA staff prior to initial eligibility determination and at least once every 6, 12, or 24 months thereafter depending on the household's circumstances. Any responsible member of the household or an authorized representative can be interviewed. The household may bring any person he/she chooses to the interview.

NOTE: When a household member or authorized representative does not complete the initial scheduled interview, the OPA Case Manager must send the household the TEAMS notice F033, RESCHED – MISSED INIT. INTER, no later than the day after the interview was scheduled.

The purpose of the interview is to review the information on the application and inquire and resolve any unclear and incomplete information. It is also used to advise the household of its rights and responsibilities, application processing procedures, and its reporting requirements. The interview is conducted as an official and confidential discussion of the household's circumstances. The household's right to privacy and confidentiality must be protected during the interview.

An interview must be scheduled as soon as possible so the household has an opportunity to participate (receive benefits) in the Food Stamp Program within 30 days following the date of application or seven days for

► expedited services.

The OPA Case Manager must notify applicants that the required in-person interview may be replaced with a telephone interview or a home visit. A home visit must be scheduled in advance with the household. The in-person interview can be replaced for the following:

1. households having no countable earned income **and** all members of the household are elderly or disabled; or,
2. hardship situations including but not limited to:
 - a. illness;
 - b. transportation difficulties;
 - c. care of a household member;
 - d. residency in a rural area;
 - e. severe weather conditions;
 - f. work or training hours; or,
 - g. other hardship situation.

NOTE: The OPA Case Manager must document in TEAMS case notes the hardship reason for replacing the in-person interview and if the household was interviewed by telephone or during a home visit.

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